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Guidance

Indecent images of children: guidance for young people

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1. Overview

Taking, making, sharing and possessing indecent images and pseudo-photographs of people under 18 is illegal.

A pseudo-photograph is an image made by computer-graphics or otherwise which appears to be a photograph.

This can include:

- photos

- tracings and derivatives of a photograph
- data that can be converted into a photograph

2. Different terms and what they mean

Definitions of some of the terms used in the legislation:

- 'indecent' is not defined in legislation but can include penetrative and non-penetrative sexual activity
- 'making' can include opening, accessing, downloading and storing online content
- 'sharing' includes sending on an email, offering on a file sharing platform, uploading to a site that other people have access to, and possessing with a view to distribute

3. Working together

The UK government is working with partner organisations including the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and the Marie Collins Foundation to ensure everyone knows the law and understands that:

- looking at sexual images or videos of under 18s is illegal, even if you thought they looked older
- these are images of real children and young people, and viewing them causes further harm
- if you stumble across sexual images or videos of someone who could be under 18 online, you should [report it to the Internet Watch Foundation \(IWF\)](#) - reporting is easy, anonymous and could help to save a child from ongoing harm.

4. What's the law?

Indecent photographs of children:

- under the Protection of Children Act 1978 (as amended), the UK has a strict prohibition on the taking, making, circulation, and possession with a view to distribution of any indecent photograph or pseudo photograph of a child and such offences carry a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment
- section 160 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 also makes the simple possession of indecent photographs or pseudo photographs of children an offence and carries a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment
- there are defences for those aged over the age of consent (16) who produce sexual photographs for their own use within a marriage or civil partnership; these defences are lost if such images are distributed

The term 'making' could include:

- opening an attachment to an email containing an image
- downloading an image from a website onto a computer screen

- storing an image in a directory on a computer
- accessing a website in which images appeared by way of an automatic “pop up” mechanism

Types of examples covered by these laws could include the following:

- a person under the age of 18 who creates, possesses and/or shares sexual imagery of themselves with a peer under the age of 18 or adult over 18
- a person under the age of 18 who possesses and/or shares sexual imagery created by another person under the age of 18 with a peer under the age of 18 or an adult over 18
- a person over the age of 18 who creates, possesses and/or shares sexual imagery of a person under the age of 18

Please be aware this list is not exhaustive and other situations could also be covered by these offences.

More information on the law is in the [Crown Prosecution Service's \(CPS\) guide on indecent images of children](#)

5. More information and support

If you have any suspicion or concerns that a child may be at risk, always contact the police. If a child is in immediate danger, dial 999 and ask to speak to the police.

Get more information and support from:

- [Internet Watch Foundation](#) – an independent charity that aims to help victims of child sexual abuse worldwide by identifying and removing online sexual imagery of under 18s, offering a place for the public to report suspected indecent images of children anonymously.
- [Marie Collins Foundation](#) – a charity enabling children who have suffered sexual abuse and exploitation online to recover and live safe, fulfilling lives.
- [National Crime Agency CEOP](#) – a command of the NCA working with child protection partners across the UK to identify and eradicate threats to children.
- [Samaritans](#) – a suicide prevention charity with a 24-hour confidential helpline.
- [NSPCC](#) – a charity working to protect children and prevent abuse.
- [Stop It Now!](#) – a child abuse prevention campaign and anonymous helpline for individuals worried about their own sexual thoughts or behaviour towards children or that of others.

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